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The Seminole Nation of Oklahoma: A Legal History.
By L. Susan Work. Foreword by Lindsay G. Robertson.
Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. xx + 334 pp.
Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

In this fascinating and well-documented account, L. Susan Work illustrates how a myriad of federal laws and

legal rulings limited tribal self-government and otherwise sought to dissolve the modern Seminole Nation. Along the way, the former attorney general of the Seminole Nation and a member of the Choctaw Nation explores the legal peculiarities of Seminole history and the ways that the federal government frequently chose to homogenize the Five Tribes into a single legal standard. Dissolution, of course, did not occur, and Work carefully reconstructs the process by which the Seminole Nation capitalized on changes in federal policies and various legal rulings to secure its sovereignty in modern America.

Most of *The Seminole Nation of Oklahoma* examines the meaning and implementation of dozens of treaties, laws, regulations, court rulings, and ordinances. It also details the explanations of various legislators and litigators, as they crafted policies intended to destroy a tribal government and otherwise dispossess the Seminoles of their land and ignore their legal claims. The volume also contains a rich governmental history, exploring 20th-century Seminole Nation–United States relations in depth as well as the dissolving and then ultimate creation of a strong tribal government. As a result, Work provides a standard text for anyone interested in understanding these modern events.

Unfolding chronologically, chapters investigate the history of the Seminoles in Indian Territory (1831–1898), the subsequent period prior to Oklahoma statehood (1897–1907), the struggle to maintain a tribal government (1906–1968), the writing of the Seminole Constitution (1964–1968), and groupings of tribal administrations (1969–1977, 1977–1985, and 1985–1993). Work covers the long-standing struggle with the federal government over mining and land rights (1904–2002) in chapter 3, and the Seminole Claims Cases (about mineral rights, railroads, leases, removal, and other issues) in chapter 4.

As a scholar and vested participant, Work acutely and persuasively offers her personal and intellectual assessments of policies and legal rulings. Hers is a powerful critique. Nevertheless, she struggles to distinguish between the various degrees of merit behind the myriad of Seminole claims against the federal government for not engaging in “fair and honorable dealings.” Instead, all legal defeats occurred despite the evidence and through faulty anti-tribal reasoning. This is a small criticism, though, of an important and compelling book.

By rendering the most informed legal history of the Seminole Nation, Work has provided what will certainly become the standard text for anyone interested in the Seminoles’ struggle for legal sovereignty and the various legal roadblocks erected by the federal government. It is

sure to become necessary reading in Native American legal history and among scholars of the Five Tribes. **Andrew K. Frank**, *Department of History, Florida State University*.